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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes (1) the reasons for not attending school given by dropouts from community colleges; (2) the situation of college graduates and the degree of their satisfaction compared with that of dropouts; and (3) the profile of the college dropout. Self-administered questionnaires were sent to college students who failed to register in September 1971. Subjects surveyed include those high school graduates who had indicated that they would be attending college in the fall as well as those who failed to return to college. It was found that students drop out of college for academic, sociological, psychological and financial reasons. (Author/HS)

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DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL ACCOUNTING: A FOLLOW-UP ON THE WITHDRAWALS FROM QUEBEC COLLEGES

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Abstract

This paper analyzes (1) the reasons for not attending school given by dropouts from community colleges, (2) the situation of college graduates and the degree of their satisfaction compared with that of dropouts, and (3) the profile of the college dropout. Self-administered questionnaires were sent to college students who failed to registered in September 1971. For the purpose of this study, a withdrawal includes the graduate and the dropout alike. The study is within the limits of demographic and social accounting, whose aim is to provide more information for institutions and students alike, and to record the feedback of college training. The study also contributes to the human resources development aspect.

Demographic and Social Accounting: A Follow-up on the Withdrawals from Quebec Colleges

This paper analyzes (1) the reasons for not attending school given by dropouts from community colleges, (2) the situation of college graduates and the degree of their satisfaction compared with that of dropouts, and (3) the profile of the college dropout.

This study within the limits of demographic and social accounting applied to educational activities. This accounting is a means of arranging within the same framework various data on the student population. It establishes a series of input-output matrices, which provide an account of student stocks and flows from one year to another and from one educational activity to a different one. In this accounting, graduates and dropouts are considered as leavers for the "outside world". From a human resources development aspect, however, the dropout is not considered a "loss", but a "semi-finished" product who integrates in the labor force and society. The process would be to follow up, by questionnaires, students who have withdrawn from school to find out why they quit. Did the training they received correspond to their expectations? Are they working in the field they were prepared for? For feedback purposes, these sepcific questions and others could also be put to graduates during the period following their graduation.

Data, Methods and Techniques

A self-administered questionnaire was sent in December 1971 by CADRE (Centre d'Animation de Développement et de Recherche en Education) to 16,028 college-leavers of the 1970-71 academic year (the 1971 graduates and those who failed to register in September of the same year). Total response to the survey was 10,447 or sixty-five percent of those approached. The relatively high rate of response is attributed to the fact that two to three letters were sent to respondents, if necessary, and as an ultimate follow-up, telephone calls were made.

The questionnaire was about the dropping-out reasons and whether the educational institution met the students' expectations. Some items were connected with the present situation of the school-leavers: their job, their salary, and the degree of their satisfaction with their training and their work. The answers to these questions would enable one to categorize college-leavers in terms of unemployment or jobs and earnings; it would also enable one to look at the development of human resources from a manpower approach and a return to education approach, though these aspects were not the major concern of the present study. On the other hand, jobs and salaries are a way of evaluating the training given at college.

Distinction was made between:

1) the programs of studies taken at college,
2) males and females,
3) college-leavers at work and those not at work or studies,

considering the above as independent variables.

The dependent variables were:

1) reasons for leaving college,
2) the present situation of the respondents,
3) their job and salary,
4) future projects, and
5) the degree of satisfaction with their previous training at college.

The hypotheses were:

1) there should be differences in the dropping-out reasons,
   a) between those having previously taken the general (pre-university) program of studies and those having taken the vocational one,
   b) between males and females,
2) there should be differences between graduates and dropouts (and between males and females) in
   a) getting a job,
   b) salary, and
   c) the degree of their satisfaction with their training and work.

The large number of respondents permitted a variety of statistical analyses to be performed, testing for significances. For the purpose of this study, a withdrawal includes the graduate and the dropout alike. A dropout is one who failed to complete his program. It should be mentioned that the public community colleges are free and offer two main programs: the general one (two-year course), leading to university entrance, and a vocational one (three-year course), which is terminal.

Findings

Of all the 1970-71 school-leavers, 53.5 percent were graduates, and 46.5 percent were dropouts. The latter significant proportion only confirms the high proportion of college dropouts mentioned in the literature on this subject (Hannah, 1970). Of the 10,477 respondents, 65.4 percent were graduates, and 34.6 percent were dropouts. Presumably, the latter express less of a feeling of belonging to the institution than graduates do.

As to the distribution of the school-leavers by sex, 49.8 percent of the males and 58.2 percent of the females were graduates, while 50.2 percent of the males and 41.8 percent of the females were dropouts. These proportions show that females persevere more than males at this level of studies. This is reflected by the fact that females make up the majority of those having completed the vocational three-year course, which is terminal and leads to the market place. In other words, girls take the shorter way to the working world as nurses, technicians, and qualified secretarial workers.

Dropping-out Reasons

Dropping-out reasons may be for academic or non-academic reasons.

Divided into three main categories, the non-academic reasons are:

1) sociological(family, college, health, marriage, personal aspirations),
2) psychological(being fed up with college programs and the establishment), and
3) financial.

Put together, the reasons given for dropping out of college were as in Table 1.

Table 1

Dropping-out Reasons

	Dropouts (in percentage) general program	vocational program
1) Academic reasons	10.4	8.1
2) Sociological reasons		
a) family pressure to leave school	4.4	3.6
b) curricula short of expectation	11.4	13.2
c) studies leading nowhere ("without utility")	6.4	6.1
d) health reasons	3.4	3.6
e) marriage and other personal aspirations	8.7	11.1

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3)	Psychological reasons		
	a) being fed up with college	19.8	16.7
	b) feeling like quitting and travelling	9.1	9.3
4)	Financial reasons	23.5	25.6
5)	Undefined	2.9	2.7

The difference in academic reasons between the two groups is explained by past schooling. High school curricula prepare much more for classic education and emphasize vocational programs less. Family pressure to leave school is minor. Asked to evaluate their college training, students, particularly those having taken the vocational program, marked down that "work trains better than college". As to the financial reasons given, it should be mentioned that community colleges are free and loans are available for those in need. Lack of money is a good reason not to pursue education, but other motives for discontent may well be behind the unwillingness to look for the money needed (Spady, 1970).

Table 2

Dropping-out Reasons of Males Compared with Females

		Males	Females
		(in percentage)	
1)	Academic reasons	11.3	4.1
2)	Sociological reasons		
	a) family pressure to leave school	4.0	5.1
	b) "work trains better than college"	14.5	7.1
	c) health reasons	3.9	8.1
	d) marriage	5.4	14.2
	e) personal aspirations	9.4	11.2
3)	Psychological reasons (fed up with college)	24.0	27.2
4)	Financial reasons	24.5	20.2
5)	Undefined	3.0	2.6

Comparing males with females gives the following picture (Table 2). Females drop out less for academic reasons. As mentioned before, they persevere

at college longer than males. Females give health reasons for dropping out more than males. The latter need more spending money than females, a fact confirmed by other studies (Pike, 1970). Males tend to be more practical ("work trains better than college"), while females, more dreamy (personal aspirations). In the matter of marriage they score the highest.

It is interesting to consider the answers of school leavers "not at work or studies", since, presumably, they should be the least satisfied with their situation or with their previous experience at college.

Table 3

Dropping-out Reasons of School-Leavers "not at Work or Studies"

	General program	Vocational program
	(in percentage)	
1) Academic reasons	13.9	7.1
2) Sociological reasons		
a) health reasons	9.6	10.2
b) other sociological or personal reasons	30.8	31.9
3) Psychological reasons (fed up with college)	26.1	24.9
4) Financial reasons	19.6	25.9

More students dropped out of the pre-university program than out of the vocational one (Table 3). Health reasons were given by a larger number of students in both programs, in comparison with the whole population approached (Table 1). A larger proportion of school-leavers having taken the vocational program had financial troubles in comparison with those of the pre-university course. They do not seem to come from high-income families.

As to present situation of college-leavers (graduates compared with dropouts), the findings are very instructive. The better off are the graduates of the vocational program. They are the best paid in comparison with their peers. Even the dropout with a two-year training seems well accepted and integrated in the labor force. About 41.4 percent of the dropouts were working and earning money. This finding confirms our premise that though being a "semi-finished" product, a dropout contributes to society. The graduates of the general program are paid less. Their studies do not lead to marketable skills, but to further studies at university. The worse off are the dropouts of the general program. They were led nowhere. In general, women fare less well than their male peers, but it seems that female graduates having finished their vocational program of studies make more than male graduates with a general college diploma.

About 73 percent of the college graduates continue their studies at university; this high percentage results from most students having taken the general program of studies. Also, 46.8 percent of the dropouts said they take courses, probably in private colleges or other training institutions. It is common to see a dropout find it wise to return to school after an outside experience (Dalrymple, 1967).

There were positive correlations between being a graduate and the degree of satisfaction at work and woth the training received at college (52.6 percent of males and 57.7 percent of females at work). But 14 percent of the graduates "not at work or studies" were only satisfied a bit or not at all with the college program they had taken. As expected, dropouts are the least satisfied with their present activity or their previous studies (28.3 percent of respondents in this category). Dropouts on the job said they were more or less satisfied (45.3 percent of the males ans 41.5 percent of the females). In all, satisfaction seems to be a function of having a job, a salary, knowing where one is going, and being integrated in the labor force and society.

The Profile of the College Dropout

On the basis of our findings and with reference to a sociological study on the college population done by Belanger and Rocher (1972), the following dropout profile was drawn. It has been found that students'school and vocational aspirations are not independent of the perception of the world and of the future society that they have, and this perception in its turn is determined by the image of today's society and the judgment they pass on it. College students feel they do not receive enough vocational guidance and so have difficulties in their decision-making regarding future studies or way of action. They hesitate, delay committing themselves, quit, and come back to school. They often pass through a period of stress, the latter being partly a result of the unrealistic ideas and the pessimism of their age. Students taking vocational courses seem to have a better sense of direction and appear

more practical, which is shown in our own study too. It seems that the role of parents in vocational guidance is nil; that of the vocational counsellor, ambiguous; and that of elder brothers, sisters, and peers, more apparent. The latter has been confirmed by other studies (Newcomb, 1966).

Our findings show that the majority of dropouts returning to school are "itinerants" who quit their studies in one college in order to continue after a certain period and an outside experience in another college, mostly private, when they also change their program of studies.

Females expressed the desire to work, reconciling it with marriage and having children (Belanger and Rocher, 1972). College girls seem more traditional about their woman's role and have only vague ideas about the equality of sexes. As to dropping out of college, health and marriage reasons seem more common among females than males.

A large number of students said they were disgusted and deceived by college. Their reproach is that college programs are not adjusted to the requirements of the working world and modern society. Courses are too bookish, are without significance, and are encumbered with "unusefulness". However, students'perception should be judged on the background of their tendency to pessimism regarding the meaning of education, related to tomorrow's society.

As said before, college students envisage the future in dark colors. They are anti-establishment, thinking of the industrial society as doomed, and having a desire to break with it, but on the other hand feeling powerless about it. A great number of students dream of travelling to warm and exotic

countries, to flee away, in a sense, and in reaction to Quebec's long winter and cold climate, presumably.

Another point is the heterogeneity of college students. There exists not only one young, but many young societies; not only one sub-culture, but many sub-cultures (Clark and Trow, 1966). Anyone trying to interpret the school and vocational aspirations of college students should consider these sub-cultures, since the perception of the world and of tomorrow's society, by the mediation of this or that sub-culture, has its impact on the students' decision to drop out of college or to pursue their schooling, or in the choice of a vocational program of studies.

In general, the findings provide feedback to college curricula and better information about the situation of school-leavers-graduates and dropouts alike. They should enlighten the institutions about their future evolution and further planning. The study also contributes to the human resources development aspect.

The Importance of the Study

This study has emphasized the part of the follow-up within demographic and social accounting. Today, no institution may consider dropouts as wastage and ignore them, particularly that a large part of them return to school. The integration of the graduates in the labor market is also a matter of concern. The follow-up creates more rapport between the college and its student population, and between the educational institution and the public at large. Our study is not just an institutional research. It goes beyond that by providing more information for the institution and student alike, and by recording the

feedback of college training.

This study should be followed by others, since a longitudinal analysis is the logical way to deal with population phenomena.

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